

Arthritis & Healthy Bones

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a disease that affects the joints (where two bones come together) and tissues around the joint in more than 43 million Americans. It means "joint swelling." Arthritis causes swelling, redness, tenderness and pain. Two of the most common forms of arthritis are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. There currently are over 100 types of arthritis and only a health care provider can determine if you have arthritis and what type.

What causes arthritis:

- **Age** - age is one of the strongest risk factors associated with arthritis.
- **Gender** - after age 45, arthritis is more common in women.
- **Obesity** - obese people are more likely to develop arthritis in the knees and other supporting joints.
- **Injury or overuse** - repeated injury or overuse of a certain joint increases the risk of developing arthritis.

What are the symptoms of arthritis?

Signs can vary greatly depending on the type of arthritis and the individual. In the most common forms, joints of the knees, fingers, wrists, ankles, hips, and/or elbows become stiff, swollen, tender and painful. This pain can be greater earlier in the morning, or get worse as the day goes on. Tiredness also occurs often, and is sometimes accompanied by the inability to sleep.

Some types of arthritis slowly spread all over the body, while others stay in certain joints. The symptoms can also be repeated, going through active phases of getting worse (this phase is sometimes called a flare). This chronic pain ranges from mild to severe and can last a lifetime.

How is arthritis diagnosed?

The best way to diagnose arthritis is by being aware of your body and its possible signs and then going to your doctor. Several criteria decide the various forms of arthritis and only a doctor will be able to verify if you have one or more types of arthritis. Most importantly, get an early, accurate diagnosis. Special attention should be taken to any swelling, stiffness, or pain in or around joints, if it lasts longer than two weeks. The earlier your doctor is able to prescribe the proper care, the greater chance you have to decrease joint damage and pain.

Is there treatment or a cure for arthritis?

At this time there is no cure for arthritis, although there are several options available to help relieve the symptoms. There are many options to treating arthritis and one should speak to his/her health care provider about what options are best.

What can be done to ease the symptoms of arthritis?

- **Exercise, especially in the water.** Staying active can help to keep joints flexible, build strength and increase range of motion. Exercising in water can reduce wear and tear on joints that are already painful. Aim to do weight-bearing activities like walking, dancing, climbing stairs, or using weights at the gym.
- **Apply a cold pack or take a bath.** A warm bath can relieve muscle tension and help to ease aching joints, while a cold ice pack can decrease pain and swelling by constricting blood vessels and stopping fluids from leaking into surrounding tissues.

(more on back)

Be Active // Be Healthy

- **Lose weight.** This will help you to feel better, since every extra pound adds to the stress on your knees and hips. Excess weight can mean more pain, no matter what form of arthritis you have.
- **Protect your joints.** Avoid excess stress on your joints, using larger, stronger joints to carry things.
- **Take time to relax.** Listening to your favorite music, laughing, gardening, and keeping a journal all help to keep your mind off pain and can be healing to your joints and mood.
- **Be aware of your medication options.** In the past few years, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved many new drugs for arthritis. If your pills are not working as well as you would like them to or are causing too many side effects, ask your doctor about more treatment options.
- **Get enough Calcium and Vitamin D.** Both are important for strong bones. Be sure to talk with your health care provider about Calcium and Vitamin D in your diet.

Resources

Arthritis Foundation
National Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin
Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NAMSIC)
WebMD

www.arthritis.org

www.nih.gov/niams/
www.webmd.com

For More Information:

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